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# Rural Tourism and Territorial Development in Italy

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## Abstract

This chapter analyses the development of rural tourism in Italy over the recent decades. Since the end of the twentieth century, also due to the crisis of industrialization and the exhaustion of the factory work model, interest in “returning to the countryside” has grown. The spreading of new social and cultural trends, more sensitive to the issues of sustainability and preservation of natural wealth, has encouraged in Italy, the country of art and the beautiful landscape, a sudden increase in new tourism initiatives that are environmental friendly and revolving around quality food and wine. The “Roads of flavours” and numerous associations of small towns have therefore been created, to enhance the Italian artistic and architectural heritage. In particular, interest in Mediterranean diet has increased, as shown by the growth in tourism linked to oil. There is no lack of compatibility problems as well as difficulties in devising new cohabitation formulas, but as this work demonstrates, after the boom of the “sun and beach” tourism of the 1960s, today a far more diversified tourist panorama has emerged, thus allowing the rural world to benefit from a renewed momentum.

**Keywords:** Italy, tourism, land, food, development

## 1. Introduction

Since the ending of the twentieth century, rural Europe has been at the core of a deep social change, which saw the countryside to evolve from a simple “production landscape” into a “consumer landscape” [1]. With the spreading of the service economy, the countryside turned into a mainly residential and recreational place [2]. It therefore increased its attractiveness by becoming more accessible and more useful, thus providing rurality with a new role within the broader social context. This change is derived from a plurality of social as well as cultural processes, such as the growing mobility and integration among goods, services, people and knowledge from different territorial areas, including rural and urban areas [3], together with a healthier life style associated with a new concept of well-being. Under these circumstances, agriculture gained new significance, by becoming a priority of rural development [4]. During the last decade, indeed, numerous studies emphasized the relation of agriculture with the environment, with other economic sectors, and with society as well. As pointed out, this approach resulted from a change in the economic and social meaning of the primary productive activities, which attributed to agriculture a different and wider role than in past times.

In this framework, consecutive Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reforms progressively broadened the rationale of the rural development policies, from the simple support to the fostering of its development through the promotion of the agricultural policies, a better care and financial aid aimed at both qualifying and preserving the environment and the rural space, the improvement of the life quality, as well as a growing diversification of the rural economy. When, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, we talk about “the revenge of the countryside” [5] and of the economic value inherent in the rediscovery of the identity of the places [6], the concept of rural development was linked to the new role attributed to agriculture in relation to the environment, to the territory, and to food safety and quality. If in the second half of the last century announcing the end of peasants, erased by industrialization and the growth of the cities [7], nowadays a new scenario of rurality is emerging, so-called the postindustrial or postmodern rurality, where agricultural development requires policies based on the territory and oriented toward general development. With the progressive establishment of a multi-functional agriculture, coherent with the guidelines of the Economic Community policy [8, 9], which is able to play different roles in addition to the traditional primary one linked to the production of food and raw materials, and the growing diversification of economic activities within the rural areas, the modern agriculture has played a different role in respect to the past, having to respond to the renewed needs of the current society in terms of food safety, environmental protection, recreational needs, and, in general, the improvement of the quality of life [10]. The general objective of this work is the analysis of the relationship among local food, rural territory and tourism. Specifically, we will investigate on how tourism linked to the enhancement of food can contribute to the development of activities related to its production, linking it to new forms of tourist experience, helping to preserve and disseminate the rural culture of a territory.

As registered by the World Tourism Organization (WTO), tourism connected to food and countryside is a quickly growing segment. A high percentage of tourists does choose tourist destination on the basis of food as well as of the will to gain positive experiences by tasting local products in small locations, renowned for their quality and their strong connection to the territory. In this way, a strong relationship has been created among free time, tourism, food rediscovery, and rural areas’ promotion, able to exert an influence on both demand and supply of tourist services.

Local traditional products, in Italy, represent a decisive component of the endogenous development of territorial systems (Food Clusters, Metropolitan Food Clusters), due to the significant economic, social, and tourist repercussions they can produce [11]. Thanks to typicality promotion, the productive function of the agricultural activities is integrated with new and diversified functions, among them are the environmental and territorial safeguard, the preservation of culture and rural traditions, and the creation of spaces and locations interested in new economic and social dynamics [12]. During the last years, it has been possible to observe a proliferation of initiatives aimed at matching the agricultural production with services (touristic, recreational, educational, social, and other services), also in order to intercept and satisfy new consumer segments interested in the fruition of agricultural products in the territory of their production, so to “plunge” within the local culture and to live consumer experiences as opportunities of cultural and social enrichment.

All the same, local public administrations look at rural as well as gastronomic tourism with renewed interest, also in the light of a strengthening of both local community identity and cohesion, by fostering synergies and links with other territorial economic activities (handicraft, tourism, etc.) so to favor a local endogenous development. The special focus we put, with this study, on the gastronomic

products has also been encouraged and supported by the growing public care for food quality, other than by the will of promoting as well as preserving local traditions and by a more general sharing of a simpler and more natural life style. It is after all of universal acknowledgement that traditional products, as forms of expression of a territorial culture, strongly affect the social and economic development of rural territories.

## **2. Toward a new vision of rural development: the relationship between local gastronomy and tourism**

By borrowing the definition from the World Food Travel Association, “*food tourism is the act of traveling for a taste of place in order to get a sense of place.*” The development of gastronomic tourism has prompted the interest of the scientific community that has begun to describe and theorize about this new social phenomenon. The research was recently directed to consider the culinary tourism as a new emerging tourist practice, showing a clear and steady increase in travel-oriented food [13, 14].

The scientific literature initially highlighted how local food could become a new tourist attraction [15] and how new tourist expectations could be created around it [16]. The study of gastronomic tourism has led some authors [17, 18] to highlight some important aspects for its development and its affirmation, identifying four categories that refer to structures, activities, events, and organizations [19]. Regarding the structures, the authors mainly refer to buildings (wineries, olive groves, farms, museums, taverns, etc.), land use (vineyards and olive groves), and to the itineraries (wine and olive oil roads, etc.). With reference to the activities, gastronomic tourism is linked to the methods of consumption of the product (tastings, pick your own activities, etc.) and to the experiences of education in the knowledge of food (cooking schools, visits to the places of production, etc.). As regarding the events, which are the third category identified by the authors, we can identify fairs, parties, and events linked to food. Finally, as regards the organizations, we refer to the presence of certification systems and the structures of the product and adherence to civil society associations that enhance the connection of food to the territory (Slow Food, National Identity Associations such as City of olive oil, City of wine, of pasta, of hazels, etc.).

In the last 20 years, food positioning in the tourism sector has changed profoundly and geographical destinations have recognized their gastronomic potential as an important attraction factor and as a new opportunity to position themselves in an even more increasing competitive global market. The interest in typical products and local food has thus acquired an ever-increasing importance among tourist motivations [20], thanks not only to the renewed attention to gastronomy that characterizes today's society, but also to the affirmation of a tourist offer of experience complex, based on gastronomic resources capable of involving and stimulating the sensorial and experiential component of tourism consumption. A gastronomic tourism is affirmed that is a movement of tourists who, while moving, buy and consume local food, observe and participate in the process of food production and consider it as the main motivation to move or at least as one of the most important activities that characterize the journey [17]. About 59% of Italian tourists consider the important or very important the presence of an enogastronomic offer and thematic experiences.

The evolution of the relationship between gastronomy and tourism has, however, been characterized by some important steps that have changed the interest and the involvement of tourists with respect to local food. Richards [20] in deepening the



relationship between gastronomy and tourism highlights what he defines the three generations of the development of this relationship. The first attempts to bring tourism and gastronomy closer together, which is what Richards calls the first generation of this relationship, were exclusively linked to the development of tourism-related experiences by producers for consumers [21]. In this phase, tourists approach the places and other cultures through food and begin to assert what will be called gastronomic tourism [22]. This first and simple approach is overcome when food begins to be considered as a possible tourist attractor to enhance and promote within the territorial tourism development strategies. If food had always been an important element for tourism, tourists have always needed to eat, now becomes one of the main reasons for visiting destinations, and food becomes a tourist experience to be practiced. These changes reinforce what is referred to as the second generation of the relationship between gastronomy and tourism, and it is in this new framework that the first activities of co-creation of gastronomic experiences have been established for a decade and consumers/tourists acquire an important role proving to know the food and local productions as much as the producers themselves.

The greater awareness acquired by consumers in the processes of creating tourist experiences linked to the local gastronomy is legitimized by the birth of the *foodies* [23, 24], figures that will be decisive for the development of gastronomic tourism. Barr and Levy [23] are the first to use the term foodies and in their text “The Official Foodie Handbooks” define them as:

*“a person who is very very very interested in food. Foodies are the ones talking about food, in any gathering over restaurants, recipes, radicchio ... They don't think they are being trivial-foodies consider food to be an art, on a level with painting or drama.”*

In recent years, gastronomy played a central role in determining travelers' expectations and motivations. Food and local culinary specialties can be currently seen as real touristic attractions and able to move a food travelers' target or “*foodies*” [25]. In this way gastronomy, as well as representing a pleasant sensory activity, does evolve into both an attraction factor and a tourist marketing tool for destinations [26]. Food, in other words, become the unifying point between territorial authenticity and a tourist ever more interested in genuine, inclusive proposals, strictly linked to the territory he is going to visit. This association is even more valid for countries such as Italy, where the combination of agriculture, agri-food products, and preservation of the historical landscape is strong. In the Mediterranean countries (Italy, Greece, and Spain), the food and gastronomic landscapes play a fundamental role in the image construction.

The affirmation of the figure of the *foodie*, which is something more than a simple gastronomic tourist because his interest in food is part of his daily lifestyle and is not just linked to the trip [27], has certainly contributed to the affirmation of not only new tourist destinations, but also of restaurants, bars, taverns, and typical places. The growing ties between food and travel become evident also thanks to the spread of not only tourist guides and specialized publications, but also of specially dedicated websites. The growing number of *foodies* is leading to adaptation of destinations to their requests and needs. Tourist destinations become *foodscape* or places that enhance and create spaces dedicated to meeting the needs of food lovers. The *foodies* are attracted by *foodscape* not only to eat and taste local food but also to stay and visit the chosen destination [20] that becomes a gateway for the local identity of knowledge and approaches tourists and residents leading them to experience a common cultural experience. It creates a unique link between food, landscapes and cultures, stimulating an active participation of consumers in the activities of producers: tourists buy typical food products in local markets, participate in cooking

classes, which use local products, choose restaurants with greater frequency, inns, and local establishments, thus determining a direct contact between those who create and those who consume food-related experiences.

Finally, the third and current generation is that linked to the enhancement of the landscapes of food, and the relationship between gastronomy and tourism is increasingly linked to the dynamics of local development and the revaluation of the landscape as an expression of all its elements, including the course of the food, the growth, and the development of *foodscape* that demonstrates this evolution. This creates spaces and places that are affected by new economic, social and tourist dynamics that satisfy new segments of consumers/tourists interested in the use and consumption of local food in the territories of production in order to “immerse themselves” in the culture of the places and to live the consumption, as cultural-enrichment opportunities, and social experiences. The *foodscape* becomes more and more a sensorial landscape, a unicum of flavors and aromas, which helps to stimulate research and the choice of a particular place to visit and which becomes an element that mainly directs the choice of the tourist [14, 28].

2.1 The role of local productions for the development of rural tourism

Local productions are part of the culture of a rural territory; they are elements of the past, expression of the traditions of a place that contribute, as argued by Dallen and Boyd [29], to a dynamic conservation of the landscape. Local products,



Figure 1.  
The regional distribution of Italy’s typical products. Source: our elaboration from [www.politicheagricole.it](http://www.politicheagricole.it).

also expression of human actions, become a product of the territory and even more an element of attractiveness and of tourist interest (**Figure 1**).

In the twenty-first century, scientific innovation and globalization have intensified the interest in food, offering a wide variety of food products, encouraging the emergence of alternative food movements, supporting a new food culture that has also enhanced the success of a gastronomic tourism. In this historical moment, food is the subject of discourses and reflections of critical and interpretive positions and is an expression of values, problems, and priorities of today's society. It has already been underlined how the discourses around food concern food safety, health, the ethical treatment of animals, the industrial impact, food production, the development of alternative food strategies, the symbolic dimension of food practices, and the socioeconomic potential that they have for local communities. So, there are numerous discourses that can be built around food: it is normally the consumerist discourse that characterizes the reflections on food, because its consumption is fundamental for life, but in the global context, we are witnessing the affirmation of new tensions and comparisons that lead to new paradigms that enhance the ethical and social aspects of food choices and promote local foods. Portman [30] argues that the defense of local food triggers discourses and new interests that rest on the awareness that food choices today no longer respond exclusively to economic indications, but increasingly reflect precise political and moral choices oriented to the issues of quality and sustainability. In fact, a new model of development has been affirmed within which local food is associated with numerous benefits, among which the increase farm incomes, greater social vitality, territorial regeneration activities, the enhancement and protection of traditional activities, and also the development and promotion of a gastronomic tourism that enhances the link between food and territory and between local cuisine and culture from which it originates [31]. In recent years, scientific literature has shown that local food, also considered a cultural and social capital [32, 33], can contribute not only to socioeconomic well-being of rural areas [34, 35] but also to their tourism development [20, 36, 37].

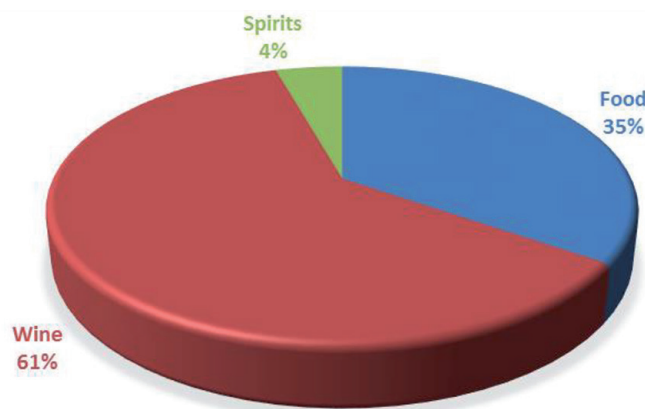
The value of food not only goes well beyond being a simple means of livelihood but can also contribute to the improvement of the tourist experience. The consumption of local food offers in fact a number of sensorial tourism experiences that link the local gastronomy to the journey and the discovery of the places [38]. Promotion of typical products through the creation of territorial as well as collective brands, hinged on the memory of places and communities, is able to trigger endogenous, integrated, and sustainable rural development paths. Therefore, both the promotion of traditional products and the development of a gastronomic tourism may represent precious opportunities in contrasting the current economic crisis. Especially in the less favored and marginal rural areas, far from the modernization process, a self-centered rural development model can make a root, characterized by the use and reproduction of experiences and knowledge locally developed to convert local resources into quality agri-food products while able, at the same time, to preserve the local elements, which are its foundation.

Within the frame of this new model, typical products become a resource capable of adding value to the development of smaller areas because they are able to integrate and enhance different territorial resources [34, 35], therefore responding to changes in the style of consumption of postmodern tourists. How to promote different territorial resources depends on the actors involved and on the strategies they decide to pursue. Traditional products, therefore, represent a potential resource for the local community and around them revolve several inclusive dynamics as well as projects of collective development. Typicality does not exclusively rest on the features of the productive process, but also on relations among the actors of the territorial system, which provide the typical product with a collective dimension.

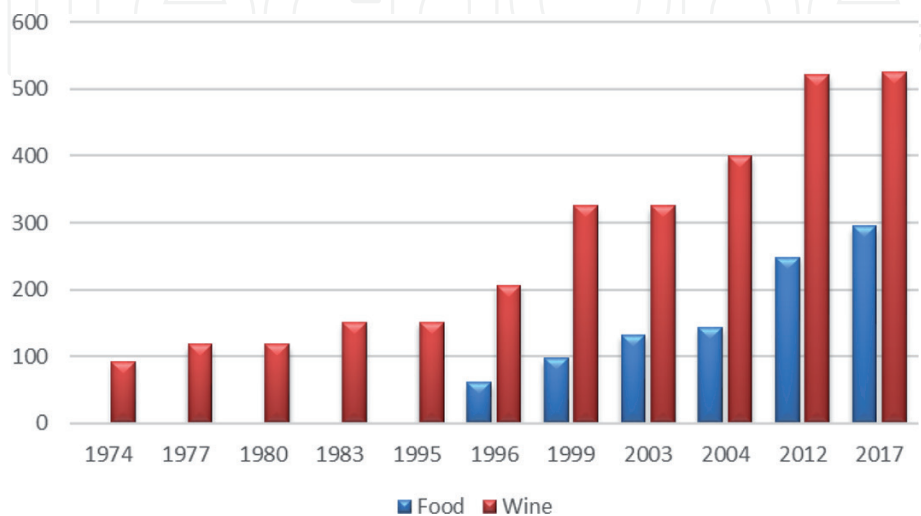
The collective nature of typical products, together with their ability to promote territorial identity, quality and culture, is bringing about the shaping of new social networks and able to steer the choices regarding local development in a direction more sensitive to issues such as the development sustainability, the communities' quality life, and the enhancement of the territorial identities [39].

2.2 Tasting of typical products: the food trail

Other than for art, Italy is worldwide identified as the country where you eat and drink well. Words as “pizza,” “pasta,” “espresso,” and “cappuccino” have conferred to food a universal dimension, thus becoming brands of a gastronomic globalization. Italy is actually one among the countries where the food and wine offer is wider and more diversified. With its 863 appellations (**Figure 2**)—299 IG food (35%), 526 IG wine geographical indications (61%), and 38 IG spirits (4%)—Italy comes before France (764) and Spain (358). The most important years in the creation of geographical indications of origin go from 1996 to 2012. Distributed by regions, agri-food IGs predominate in Emilia Romagna (45), Veneto (38), and Lombardy (36), while wine appellations prevail in Piedmont (59) and Tuscany (58). Furthermore, in Italy, there are 172,688 restaurants of which are 586 of excellence, 11,632 farms with restaurants, 18,632 farms with accommodation, 170 wine routes



**Figure 2.**  
Geographical indications of Italy's food (2019). Source: our elaboration from [www.qualigeo.eu/statistiche-eu-dop-igp-stg/](http://www.qualigeo.eu/statistiche-eu-dop-igp-stg/).



**Figure 3.**  
Trend geographical indications of Italy's wine and food (1974-2017). Source: our elaboration from [www.qualigeo.eu/statistiche-eu-dop-igp-stg/](http://www.qualigeo.eu/statistiche-eu-dop-igp-stg/).



and flavors, and 99 museums of taste (reports on gastronomic tourism, data from 2016 to 2017) (**Figure 3**).

These few numbers help to understand the articulation of the gastronomic tourism economic background, which merges together countryside and city, family kitchen and starred cuisine, large markets and small shops, private companies, and public policies. In the first year of life, the *Fabbrica Italiana Contadina* (FICO), the large thematic area inaugurated in Bologna, had 1 million visitors, and the turnover was 50 million euros. Another Italian event related to food and that attracts hundreds of people is the Vinitaly organized every year in Verona. In the last editions dedicated to showcase Italian and world wine, there were more than 200,000 visitors, demonstrating the economic and media force of great food-related events in contemporary society [40].

Special attention deserves the routes of wine, oil, pasta and flavors because they are networks spread all over the Italian peninsula by involving a large number of small municipalities. The routes of flavors are a tool, which offers to a vast part of the Italian peninsula the opportunity of an evolution oriented toward both the upgrading and the development of the territory. This process is important to promote the development of less economically advanced areas, such as mountain areas currently experiencing a loss of population as well as of economic activities. In these areas, in fact, most of the typical products are produced (3200 local productions come from the Italian mountain areas), they in these territories, less favored and tendentially excluded from modernization processes, become a resource capable of giving value to their development by integrating and enhancing the different territorial resources. Moreover, it is unanimously recognized that typical products, as a form of expression of the culture of a territory, greatly influence the social and economic development of local rural territories, in particular through the achievement of the following socioeconomic benefits: the increase in income from agricultural enterprises, greater social vivacity, a territorial regeneration, through the valorization and conservation of traditional activities, and finally also the development of a food and wine tourism that can contribute to improving the economic sustainability of these territories.

On the backdrop of a global redefinition of economic balances, the routes of typical products—much of them located also in marginal territories and mountains areas—operate at different levels, including the promotion of tourist systems and thematic routes that are able to bring back vitality to marginalized areas faraway from major routes and rail links. Geographical marginality can, therefore, become a useful resource, and the routes represent an efficient tool of its promotion and image communication. They include a very articulate set of initiatives, which involves a wide number of public and private actors variously participating a network, which is going to become, thought in a way not always systematically integrated, the engine of new forms of local development among shapes, structures, and geographies of a constantly changing territory.

The innovative dimension of the roads' governance is based upon the necessity of building strategic alliances, which demand territories to establish new relations reshaped according to common interests and objectives, and it can now operate through a multitude of instruments of various kinds, such as strategic plans and programs, projects of territorial, urban, environmental and tourism marketing, integrated projects, etc. These tools represent an innovative approach for the governance of territorial development and transformation processes in terms of environmental and socioeconomic sustainability, not last thanks to the use of adequate information systems, the formation of consent, and the participatory construction of decision-making processes.

A route of typical products originates from the will and the union of the strengths of numerous subjects, linked together by an effort of engagement and networking led within the frame of a territory. It is possible to identify its main components by analyzing the product (wine, oil, pasta, cheese, rice, etc.), the territory (countryside, burgs), the ecosystem (landscape and environment quality enhancement), and the key players: producers, tour operators, associations, and institutions.

The routes, therefore, represent an example of public-private collaboration that aims at channeling, through thematic routes, various subjects of a specific territory, which compose a supply chain around a typical product, thus integrating the product knowledge and tasting as well as the tourist use of territory in a coherent meta-market. In fact, the establishment of the routes determines the implementation of a tourism development strategy especially addressed to more fragile territories, such as the rural areas, where the main tourist attraction is the presence of an intangible heritage that must be enhanced through experiential, sustainable, and quality development models.

More specifically, the Italian legislator has enacted a specific national law for the wine routes whose aims, however, can be extended to other typical products such as oil, cheese, etc. The roads of wine are indeed governed by the law of the 27th July 1999, n. 268, where, in Article 1, they are defined: “(...) paths marked and advertised with appropriate signs, along which gather natural, cultural and environmental values, vineyards and cellars of single or associated farms open to the public; they represent an instrument through which the territories and the relative productions can be disseminated, commercialized, and enjoyed in form of tourist offer.” Main goal of the law is to promote territories with a wine vocation, with particular reference to places with high-quality productions. National legislation highlights how a route can be considered as an integrated system of both territorial and tourism offers organized along a route characterized by places of historical, artistic and environmental interest, flanked at the same time by a series of structures of reception, promotion and marketing of local products. Definition in art.1 of the 1999 national law reflects an approach consistent with the new multifunctionality of the rural world. This regulatory intervention provides the necessary prerequisites in order to increase the competitiveness of the territorial systems and to contribute to the formation of the roads themselves, by aiming at creating effective networks characterized by a bottom-up approach, which require active partnership as well as planning skills on the part of the public and private operators belonging to both the chain of typical products and the tourism sector (**Figure 4**).

Wine tourism turnover in Italy ranges between 2.5 and 3.5 billion euros as a result of a tourist movement involving about 4 million people. A prime example of transformations connected to the gastronomic development is the small Tuscan town of Montalcino where, between 2011 and 2016, tourist arrivals related to wine increased by 125% (from 5000 to 24,000), thus favoring a multiplication of hotel facilities (from 14 to 50) and beds (from 78 to 620). Montalcino, which takes advantage of the excellent international image enjoyed by Tuscany, is not a lonely example of growth. Among other areas in Italy that in recent years have experienced a radical change in their image are Conegliano (Veneto), Oltrepò Pavese (Piedmont), the Langhe (Piedmont), and Montefalco (Umbria). These places are a clear demonstration of changes that have taken place in Italian tourism over the last decades when, under the effects of the industrialization crisis and of the growing criticism about the massive construction of the coasts, the tourism model moved from a mass “sun and beach” tourist offer toward a more diversified idea of how to enjoy a free time. In the light of this new tourist demand, related to the attractiveness of the campaign and of the consumption of typical products, producers also were induced to adapt



**Figure 4.**  
*Wine routes in Italy (2019). Source: our elaboration.*

their structures from simple places of production into suitable structures for tourist accommodation.

Some figures can help to clarify. In Italy, there are today more than 1200 cellars equipped to receive tourists and the cellars that can be visited are over 12,000. During individual visits and wine tours, they offer tastings, visits to the vineyards, and other recreational and educational activities. Estimating the economic impact of food and beverage tourism is, at best, very difficult. In an approximate way, knowing that this industry is characterized by a particular type of tourists—the food travelers—which escapes easy definitions and estimates suggest that the wine tourists who visit the cellars bring about a 31.35% increase in turnover, an increase that should be distributed through the entire tourist supply chain (hotels, restaurants). These percentages recall those of the WFTA, according to which approximately 25% of visitor spending can be attributed to food and drink while traveling. This change took place almost naturally in extra-European countries such as Australia or New Zealand, where the wine tourism sector grew together with viniculture, while in Italy and in the European countries in general, the transformation of wineries in tourist destinations has induced a business change in order to adapt buildings and rural settings to visiting activities. A change was also required in terms of offering the visitor the image of a sustainable production, attentive to the preservation of nature and to the application of the most modern technologies for recycling and saving energy. In this sense, wine tourism at the beginning of the twenty-first century is a perfect example of contemporary society trends.



### 3. Landscapes and cultural heritage, a case study: the olive oil tourism in Italy

Olive tree is the most typical Mediterranean plant and olive oil, other than the symbol of a millenary culture, and is considered since the twentieth century as a fundamental food for the health of people (Mediterranean diet). Moreover, olive tree and oil are two clear examples of environmental and social sustainability. Given this cultural value, in recent years, following the wine model, tourism too has begun to look with interest at the attractiveness of the olive-covered landscapes as well as to the possibility to be acquainted with the olive oil production techniques. A specific tourist offer has, therefore, been created, which is strongly linked to both the territory and the history of the Mediterranean countries.

There are numerous studies that highlight a relationship between tourism and olive oil; initially the international literature, in particular in Australia, has highlighted how oil tourism is essentially an expression of the wider phenomenon of rural tourism [40, 41]. Furthermore, the study of tourism related to olive oil has been investigated in Europe, especially in Italy and Spain [42–45] where the researches have not only enhanced the rural aspect but also highlighted how the interest in olive oil can give value to the tourist image of a destination becoming a new narrative of the territory that underlines the link between landscapes, culture, typical products, and tourism [46]. Oil tourism does not just become a further expression of the activities linked to rural tourism and to the agri-tourism, but also to cultural tourism and for its organoleptic qualities, that of health [47]. The results of the first studies on oil tourism conducted by Ruiz Guerra [47] show how initially, the interest of tourists in the olive oil industry was linked above all to the sale of products connected to it, which then activated new forms of economy for the territory, as had already happened for wine tourism [48, 49]. However, the researches that highlight the interest of tourists increase not only for oil production, but also for production sites and landscapes [40]. Furthermore, oil tourism refers not only to representational images and to visual perceptions of places, but also to a perception relative to the other senses. In fact, the results of a recent research [39] highlight how tourists show a particular interest in visiting the mills that become a new resource for tourism development linked to the world of olive oil.

The implants for the production of oil, as well as being the places that are characterized by the proposal of emotional content and *sense making*, constitute a concrete case to be placed in the broader concept of heritage cultural [50]. In fact, oil mills are to be considered a testimony to the time of the oil production processes. As a result of the standardization imposed by industrialization, oil mills handed down the specificity of the individual territories, for example, thinking to the high historical value of the mills in the grottoes existing in the Italian region of Puglia. The historical oil mills can thus constitute fundamental architectures for the enhancement of the territory, because they allow the visitor to get closer to realities that bear witness to the knowledge and the productive know-how of a community, the relations with the territory where they insist, contributing with their presence and activities to an economic and social enrichment.

With this in mind, buildings that still retain particular architectural values must be protected and enhanced through initiatives that support the agricultural production of services (tourism, recreational, educational, and social). New forms of use of the mills are established in which tourism activity is taking a leading role, as demonstrated by the results of the research that will be presented in the following paragraphs. Olive oil tourism is certainly a recent phenomenon of tourism; it is a matter of following in the footsteps of wine tourism that has managed to place the



cellars (new and old) at the center of public attention, attracted now by the valuable historical buildings now from the shapes created by modern architects [51, 52]. For olive oil tourism, the experience of wine tourism should offer points of comparison to exploit the mill in that building and not only as a working space. Next to the conventional museums (Olive oil Museums), the mills have the characteristics to transform themselves into real museums aimed at describing to the public all aspects related to the production of oil, fundamental aspect that distinguishes the needs of the new tourist related not only to the dimension of seeing but also of learning and knowledge. One could speak of a museum with a high didactic impact where to combine the value of olive oil with the weight of history and tradition.

In this new context, the dynamics of tourism, linked to the characteristics of the tourist experience, also applies to the tourism of the olive oil and to the possible and manifold offers that the tourist system connects to it. The activities that may be linked to the development of olive oil tourism involve several subjects, primarily tourists who have the opportunity to know the territory through a typical product and the tourist experiences connected to it, the producers that can enhance their business with a new way of marketing their product, and finally the tourism system that has the opportunity to redevelop and characterize its offer with specially prepared tourist itineraries with the involvement of the hospitality and catering sectors. Although a part of the literature [43] argues that the tourist itineraries linked to oil do not have a great development, in Italy, there are many experiences of territories that have activated paths of knowledge of the oil, made by both producers and institutions, which present oil as a qualifying element of the territorial offer. For example, the regional route of the POD Umbrian olive oil, whose characteristics will be presented later, qualifies as a possibility of knowledge, promotion, marketing, and enhancement of the oil throughout the territory involved in the itinerary.

The road of typical products thus becomes an instrument for the promotion and diffusion of local culture and traditions linked to oil [53]. In Italy, these roads are highly specialized and concern single local productions, wine, oil, cheese, apples, etc. But in some territories, a different orientation is starting to prevail, perceptible by the same road names, more generally defined roads of flavors, where the degree of specialization decreases, highlighting territorial experiences of itineraries that include wine, olive oil and other quality agri-food products. The presence of tourist itineraries on the olive oil is certainly one of the important tools of promotion and local valorization, along the routes the tourist has the opportunity not only to meet points of direct sale of the oil, to make visits to the mills, to taste the oil of olive, but also to observe the landscape in which the itinerary develops. In this context, olive oil tourism can help to activate development processes aimed at reconstructing the local cultural identity understood as the identification, protection, and enhancement of all the factors that contribute to creating the specificity and uniqueness of the places and the environment. There are tourists who seek and ask more and more landscape, more and more nature, and desire a deep and direct contact with the values of rural culture; the heritage inherited from the past becomes an element of interest and also of tourist interest. The olive oil, the rediscovery of the values and traditions linked to it, therefore represents the possibility of development of the territories, especially those of a rural nature, and can become the fulcrum around which to propose and/or redesign cultural tourism offers [54, 55]. Olive oil in some territorial contexts is a heritage in which a community identifies itself and makes the place in which it presents unique and can develop around itself interesting experiential tourist practices that contribute to making the tourist feel, even if temporarily, part of the history of a place. Olive oil tourism can also offer interesting answers to the question of authenticity that characterizes important and growing

segments of tourist demand [56], proposing tourist experiences that trigger a knowledge and a comparison between the tourist and the identity of the territory.

In this framework, the University of Perugia carried out a specific research devoted to this innovative tourism custom by relating it with a significant initiative aimed at the promotion of olive oil, named *Frantoi Aperti* (Opens Oil mills), which takes place in Umbria. This research, titled “Oil tourism as a tool for enhancing the action of rural territories: the case of the PDO Umbria Oil Road” represents in Italy the first attempt of reflection and study on the theme of olive oil tourism. The main objective of the research was to understand how innovative initiatives to promote the territory as *Frantoi Aperti* (Opens Oil mills) can identify in the oil product a possible driver able to promote the development of tourist flows related to the environment, the culture and the discovery of rural areas. With reference to the methodology adopted, the research activity has contemplated the administration of a questionnaire to tourists present during the six weekends of the 2013 edition of *Frantoi Aperti*. There were collected 228 questionnaires aimed at understanding the profile of the tourist who participates in *Frantoi Aperti* investigating the reasons for his visit. The investigation and survey activities were carried out in the municipalities participating at the event “*Frantoi Aperti*” in 2013, which involved 30 mills with guided tours to the oil plants in processing, to the new oil tasting, and to other regional products and activities.

The exploratory survey was carried out on a sample that is not statistically representative, however, able to elaborate interesting elements of reflection about the links among territory, oil and consumption styles that could be analyzed in order to provide useful information to administrators and operators of the territory and able not only to increase but also to enhance and “spread” the quality of the initiative and therefore also its tourist visibility. The administered questionnaire provided for four different thematic sections includes: profile of the interviewed tourist; permanence and hospitality: in the second area, it is represented by the duration of the visit and the type of accommodation chosen; the motivation that pushes the tourist to participate in the *Frantoi Aperti* event and its level of satisfaction regarding the organization and reception and hospitality of the territory; and styles of consumption and oil product: the last section of the questionnaire was dedicated to the behavior and daily habits of food consumption of the tourist.

Furthermore, the research activity has provided the creation of in-depth interviews to a representation of privileged stakeholders of the territory (local authorities, entrepreneurs, producers, bloggers, etc.) in order to understand the motivations that led them to join “the *Frantoi Aperti*,” the advantages and opportunities of their participation as well as their contribution to the realization of the event. The stakeholders interviewed highlighted how the increase in visibility and knowledge of both the territory and its companies is the main reason behind the adhesion to “*Frantoi Aperti*” on the part of local authorities, producers, and owners of accommodation facilities, who evaluate positively the initiative and consider it a possible instrument, which could contribute to the promotion and de-seasonalization of the territories involved.

This research allows to observe that a specific profile of the olive oil tourist begins to take shape: the empirical survey emphasizes as this new figure considers the interest in the oil product in itself as one of the main travel motivations and as a tourist experience to be practiced. The olive oil tourist is also interested in the knowledge of food landscape in which the relationship between gastronomy and tourism is linked to the enhancement of the landscape as an expression of all its identifying elements including food. The food and culture of the territory connected to it thus form an ideal harmony for tourists who express their interest not only for the gastronomic product itself, but also for all the aspects that characterize the landscape, its history, and its traditions [20]. Attention to food is increasingly

characterized by sociocultural, political, and economic elements that are contributing to the affirmation of the concept of food of the territory, foodscape, not only as a vehicle of tradition and memory but also as a food landscape, which represents not only the complexity of production, but also of the conservation and enhancement of local productions [50]. In conclusion, olive oil tourism can contribute to the local development of rural territories with the networking of local resources and skills, through a participatory project that activates sustainable processes of value creation not only for tourists but also for the local community.

#### **4. Conclusions**

This study demonstrates the significance assumed over the last decades by the world revolving around food. Food highlights how feeding choices, in the current society, not only derived from economic conditions, but also that reflect political and social choices, are oriented by themes such as quality, authenticity, as well as sustainability. Relationship between food and territory has developed very quickly, and this new food culture has also enhanced the emergence of gastronomic tourism. Territories are today very aware of the significance of their gastronomic potential, primarily based on tourism: tourists prefer to buy and consume local food while at the same time observing and participating in its production process, by increasingly considering it as the main reason for moving or, at least, as one of the most important activities that characterize their trip.

A new tourist demand has emerged, which identifies in the typical product an element capable of combining the authenticity and specificity of a territory with its knowledge and the experience of its tasting. The tasting of the gastronomy and the knowledge of the production processes of local agri-food typicality has started indeed being considered tourist practices that allow travelers to get in touch with a heritage consisting in local history, typicality, lifestyles, and traditions.

From this work, we also derive important considerations regarding the relationship among food, rural areas, and tourism: promotion of local food can contribute to rural area development and socioeconomic well-being also through the growth of a gastronomic tourism hinged on the link with the territory, on local cuisine, as well as on the culture from which it originates.

Furthermore, this chapter stresses the value of resources and tourist services, which are developing around local products, especially promotion and knowledge paths such as the roads of wine, oil and flavors, as well as the installation of dedicated museums and the organization of festivals and events. Italian territories are increasingly characterized as foodscape, and the relationship between gastronomy and tourism is increasingly tied to the dynamics of local development as well as to the enhancement of landscape as an expression of all its identity elements, including food.

Food and culture of the territory connected to it thus form an ideal harmony for tourists and for the inhabitants who express their interest not only for the gastronomic product itself, but also for all the aspects that characterize the landscape, its history, and the cultural base. The attention to food is increasingly characterized by sociocultural, political, and economic elements that are contributing to the affirmation of the concept of food districts, as a vehicle not only of tradition and memory but also of agricultural landscapes that represent not only the complexity of production, but also the conservation and enhancement of local productions, especially in rural areas. The protection of local food production can thus contribute to the socioeconomic development of rural territories by networking the resources and skills present in them, through strategic actions that activate

sustainable processes of value creation not only for tourists but also for of the local community.

Food and culture of a territory represent an ideal balance for both its tourists and inhabitants who are interested not only in the gastronomic product itself, but also in its relation with landscape, including landscape history and cultural heritage. Attention for food is increasingly marked by sociocultural, political as well as economic elements, all contributing to designing the new concept of “food districts,” meant as a vehicle of tradition and memory. Especially, these new trends emphasized the significance of agricultural landscapes able to convey the idea of the complexity of the production process, along with those of preservation and enhancement of local productions, especially in rural areas. Safeguarding local food production can thus contribute to the socioeconomic development of rural territories by networking their resources and skills through the implementation of strategic actions able to activate sustainable value chain interesting not only for tourists but also for the local community.

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